

# An Inconvenient, but Crucial Truth

by Fred Tomlinson

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of absolute surrender to God, drawing insights from the Apostle Paul's unwavering commitment despite facing imminent danger. It challenges listeners to move beyond nominal commitment to Christ and embrace total surrender, highlighting the transformative power of yielding completely to God's will.*

**Scripture:** Acts 20:24, Acts 21:13, Romans 12:1, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:7, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:6, Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23, Ephesians 4:22

**Topics:** "Absolute Surrender", "Transformative Commitment"

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## Description

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## Transcript

It really is a pleasure to be together. My name is Fred Tomlinson, and I'm speaking to you really from a segment of a Zoom fellowship meeting in the Mackenzie Fellowship in Abbotsford, British Columbia, but it's a wonderful privilege to be able to also speak to all of the people out there that will be listening, and may the Lord bless each and every one. Now I'm going to be speaking as a couple of verses from two chapters in the Book of Acts from chapter 20 and chapter 21, and it's not common for me to give a title to my message in the meeting, sometimes I have to do it after the meeting, but the title that just occurred to me after I'd sort of given thought to what I was going to be saying was this, an inconvenient yet crucial truth, an inconvenient yet crucial truth.

In the 20th chapter of the Book of Acts, we find that we're in the midst of the travels of the Apostle Paul, and at this point in time, in chapter 20, he's travelling with a group of other men with him. I mean, for example, Luke for sure is with him, Luke is the one who is the writer, the author of the Book of Acts, and so he's giving his report, and what a tremendous report he is able to give when we think of all that's documented here for us. We just wish he hadn't stopped when he did stop, and that there was a bit more to the Book of Acts, but there you are, the Holy Spirit was in control of all of that.

So we've got Luke, we've got, in verse 4 you'll see we've got Sophita from Berea, we've got Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, we've got Gaius from Derbe, we've got Timothy and Tychicus, and

Trophimus from Asia. So quite a group moving along, and then if you turn with me into chapter 21, and down to verse 8, we'll just break in there, and the next day we that were of Paul's company departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist, which was one of the seven, and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy, and we tarried there many days.

Let's break off there for a moment, you of course know very well who Philip was, we met him first of all back in the sixth chapter of the book of Acts, and he as was noted here was one of the seven men with superb credentials, if I may put it that way, who were selected in the early church to fulfil a particular role, and we enjoy reading through the developing story back there in the sixth chapter, and from there a number of things happened, and I'm trying to think how to say it, just put it very briefly, but by the time we reach chapter 8 of Acts, we find Philip in Samaria with a truly remarkable ministry. Much could be said about that, and one day perhaps we will, but now as we find ourselves in the 21st chapter of Acts, we believe that this is 20 years later, 20 years after Acts chapter 6, that's got nothing to do with the chapter numbers, but this is what people who study things very very carefully tell us, and there's reason to believe, we're looking at about 20 years after that particular event, and much has happened, as I've intimated already, he'd been travelling with a remarkable ministry, but clearly also he had got married and had settled in Caesarea, and the statement included in this little section of verses concerning his daughters is quite remarkable, that he had four daughters who did prophesy, and he said, just a comment here, I mean, obviously no parent has complete control over their children and what they do or how they turn out ultimately or what their responses to the Lord may be, if we're Christian parents, we're concerned about that and there's no doubt there's been a lot of prayer for that, even as I'm saying this, if I can digress even further. It just comes to my mind when I was a little boy.

I lived on my own with my mum and dad until I was age seven before a brother came on the scene. But I can remember in those early days, I can't tell you how old I was, but I was very young and I'd been put to bed and, however, in the tiny little house where we lived, I had got out of bed and I was sitting on the top stairs, peeping through crevices or openings in the boards which divided the stairs from the living room where my mother and father were. And I can still remember to this day seeing them there, bowed in prayer, and they were praying for me there.

Now, this is not unusual for Christian parents, but it's just a particular memory that I have and how thankful I am, grateful to God to have had parents who loved the Lord Jesus and who set a tone and an example for me. And clearly, Philip and his wife, his wife we do not know of course, we know nothing about her, but they obviously had prayed much and what a wonderful privilege they had to have their four daughters recorded. They would never know this of course, but to be recorded in the very book which we consider to be the inspired Word of God.

And beyond that, I remember many years ago, I can't tell you where I read this, but I read in some apocryphal writing, so I can't vouch for every word being as accurate as I am when I think of the Holy Scriptures. But in that apocryphal writing, it made a reference to Philip's four daughters and described them as burning luminaries. What a wonderful, wonderful thing.

And so here we are, if you like, we're in Philip's house with his wife and his four daughters. I don't know if there are any other members of the family there, but they are mentioned in particular. But now, in this verse that I just read to you, in verse eight, Paul comes along and he brings his companions with him that we've just noted in the earlier chapter.

So we're looking now at 15 plus people in this house and just thinking about that. What a wonderful meeting that must have been with these folk all together. I have some personal memories of being together in homes where there's been a group of people together.

Sometimes it's been leading men and women that we've had the privilege of working with and knowing and to pray together. I'm thinking of one time it was just one man and one woman. They were not married.

The woman was a missionary in India and the man was a ministering brother that we thought a lot of. And they were in our home and we had a time of prayer. I'm still remembering that moment to hear those two mature people of God lifting up and opening their hearts in that situation.

So I'm thinking about this house here as they worship together. I'm sure they sang together as well and how wonderful that must have been. But Paul was there and I know one of the people listening to me right now in this meeting has been just very blessed reading about Paul of late.

That word got back to me. Of course Paul the Apostle, he was a giant in so many ways. He was what today I suppose we might refer to as the real ordeal.

He was an authentic man of God. He was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. But he had this remarkable, remarkable conversion.

He had this remarkable revelation from God which we today are so indebted to God for. He also was a man of great experience. By the time he's sitting here in this house with this group of people, we're looking at a man who clearly was at the centre of the gathering.

He was the man with remarkable experience. He paid a huge, huge price already for the experience that he'd gained over the years. I mean just for a moment, just consider his journey.

Let me put it this way. He had his life threatened in Damascus in Acts chapter 9. He had his life threatened again also in chapter 9 but this time in Jerusalem. By chapter 13 he's been persecuted and run out of Antioch.

In chapter 14 he's faced possible stoning in Iconium. Also in chapter 14 he's been stoned and left for dead in Lystra. In chapter 16 he's been beaten with rods and imprisoned.

In chapter 16 also we find that he's been cast out of Philippi. In chapter 17 his life is threatened again in Thessalonica. He's also been forced out of Berea.

He's been mocked in Athens. He's been brought before the judgment seat in Corinth in Acts chapter 18. He's been opposed by the silversmiths in Ephesus in chapter 19.

In chapter 20 the Jews have plotted against him in Greece and here he is sitting with these brethren, his companions, enjoying the hospitality of Philip and his family. And then, I don't know if it worked out quite like this, whether the bell rang or there was a knock on the door. I'm sure it wasn't the bell ringing though.

But there was someone at the door. We read about this in chapter 21 and verse 10. And as we tarried there many days there came down from Judea a certain prophet named Agabus.

And when he was come unto us he took Paul's girdle and bound his own hands and feet and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle and shall deliver

him into the hands of the Gentiles. And I'll just break away from the text for a moment at this particular point. I mean, we've met Agabus on one earlier occasion as we've read through the book of Acts and that would have been in chapter 11.

And where he gave a prophecy on that occasion. And so he now, and I doubt that he was travelling alone, so the company is now even larger. And it's at this point when, in a sense, things got even more interesting.

Because he proceeds with this very graphical, very graphic rather, and very strange visual aid. And Paul, without any question, was the focus of what took place. Now, I don't want to spend a long time here, but there are questions that have been asked concerning Agabus.

Was he a genuine prophet of God? As it would seem to be the case, but that's been brought into question. In giving this prophecy, was this the Holy Spirit telling Paul that he must not proceed and go to Jerusalem? If that was the case, was Paul then disobedient? These are the kinds of questions that have been raised and we can give our own particular opinions in response to that. But what we do know with certainty is that the man who was being addressed, the focus of this event, was no stranger to danger.

I mean, that's become very clear from the various references that I've made already. He knew very, very well indeed, who knew better than him, the danger that is to be faced in preaching this message that he had. And, I mean, just to add to that, let me just ask you to turn your Bible, if you're following me, in the text to the earlier chapter again, to chapter 20.

And he's talking to a group of elders at Ephesus, and I'm breaking into this unfolding section, but let me go to verse 22, where we read, And now, behold, I go in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesses in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. And I'm stopping the reading there, and in verse 37, as we read down, when the elders all heard this, when he had thus spoken, in verse 36, he kneeled down and prayed with them all, and they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should not see his face any more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

And in 21, chapter 21, and in verse 3, I read, Now, when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand and sailed to Syria, and landed in Tyre, for there the ship was to unlaid her burden. And finding certain disciples, we tarried there seven days, who said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. And so it goes on, and I'd like to read more, but for time's sake, I won't.

So there's another occasion where there's even a direct reference to these people being led, they feel, by the Spirit of God to warn the Apostle about the danger that they had. So for Paul, the fact of danger lying ahead of him was not new, so this word which Agabus is bringing is not like some fresh new word in that sense, which raises questions in my mind at least, it has done, in particular. What was really going on? Without any question, and I'm not challenging the fact that Agabus was an authentic prophet of God, bringing the word from the Spirit of God, I'm not doubting that, I don't doubt it.

And I also know that it was a very dramatic way in which he is sort of demonstrating what lay ahead for Paul. So it's definitely a warning, and I ask you to understand that, it's definitely a warning. But what if, this is my question, what if the message that Agabus brought by the Holy Spirit was not really for Paul after all, although Paul was the centre of all that was going on, what if the Holy Spirit was actually providing a very dramatic visual aid for everyone who is sitting around in that house on that occasion and watching, what if

the Spirit of God was addressing the, what if he's addressing you and me, to the point.

This man who was a man of God, who bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus, who was carrying this truly remarkable revelation of the Spirit of God and of the truth of God. And I was struck with this thought, and it's not part of the text, it's another way of seeing it, but it's what the Lord laid on my heart, that really what was happening was in the audience that was sitting there, the Holy Spirit was focusing in on this authentic apostle of Jesus Christ, this experienced man of God who'd suffered already so much for his faithfulness to God and to the Gospel. And now with this clear word coming to him the trouble lay ahead, and there was an opportunity for those gathered around to watch, as I'm very, very sure in my own mind they were doing, they were watching the apostle who was the target of this word, and they were watching his response.

How would he respond to it? And I sense that God wanted to do that, he wanted this gathering of people to watch how a true man of God, a man whose life was wholly and totally given over to God, would respond when faced as though there's spotlights on him on this occasion, when he's faced once again with the fact that there's even more trouble lying ahead for him round the next corner. How would he respond? And once again I'm thinking if that's true, if you can embrace with me that possibility, which I think is a distinct possibility, what if the Spirit of God is using this very passage of Scripture of this event in that house on that occasion to actually impress upon you a message today? If there's something through this that God wants to impress upon you, look back into chapter 20, I deliberately stopped the reading short, but having heard the apostle saying he only knows that in verse 23, that bonds and afflictions abide me, are they going to be ongoing? Verse 24, but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry that I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God. None of these things move me.

Do you see, this is the response that the people were watching, this is the response that we're looking at this morning, the response of a man who is wholly, utterly, and completely given over to God. There's only one thing that concerns him, that he might finish the course of ministry which God had entrusted to him, and that he may do it to the glory of God. Back into 21 again, to the home of Philip, and we find here, after we've come through verses 11 and 12, where he's being warned by Agabus, verse 13, then Paul answered, what mean you to do to break my heart? For I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying the will of the Lord be done. What a remarkable, remarkable man was this Paul. How does that challenge your heart? It challenges my heart, as God put this word on my heart to share today.

I had some other thoughts for today, but this seemed to just eclipse that word, and I'm certain that God is wanting to speak to people who will hear this message today. And it's as though, this is how I see it, it's as though the Holy Spirit of God is bringing this story, putting it, sort of the floodlights on it, and it's lit up in brilliant technicolour, and God is using the response of a true man of God to the imminent danger that faced him, and to see just the grace, and the confidence, and the peace, and the commitment of an authentic man of God. You know, this revelation, this vision, if you will, is so needed today, I believe.

I'll tell you why it's needed today, it's because the common message today, I'm talking within the evangelical community, the common message gives a kind of a thumbs up to commitment to Christ. I don't especially like the term thumbs up, but it came to me, it's certainly in vogue, and especially as we're

dealing with YouTube. I mean, it's one thing if you have a YouTube channel, or you put information on the YouTube, and you see a thumbs up, you say, well, that's good.

But it's so incredibly nominal, as contrasted to the kind of comments that some people leave after they've watched or listened to a message that we believe to have come from God. And to hear people's hearts expressing their profound appreciation and sense that God has spoken to them, that means 10,000 times more than someone giving you a thumbs up. And what I'm saying is that today, it's so common that so much ministry today gives a kind of a thumbs up to the concept of commitment to Jesus Christ.

And yet that same message seldom, seldom frames the message within the biblical demand for absolute surrender. Many claim to have, quote, accepted Christ as their Saviour, and yet know nothing at all of absolute surrender to God. Absolute surrender to God is not some kind of option or optional experience.

It's not a kind of add-on at all. I deliberately think of it in terms of a demand, the demand to be totally and fully surrendered. Appreciate what Bob was saying about the hymn.

And I know Bob is a great hymn lover and has a lot of stories that he's gathered about behind so many hymns. But, you know, there's a hymn of Isaac Watts that I've actually been heard to say quite a number of times. It's my favourite hymn.

I have quite a lot of favourites actually. But I remember some years ago my daughter knew that I'd said that and she had the whole thing framed for one of my bigger birthdays. I've had a few of those.

But the hymn is, When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died. And the other line says, Love so amazing, so divine. And many hymn books put the words, Shall have my life, my all.

But, you know, that's not what the hymn writer wrote. He said, Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life and my all. It demands it.

And of course the scriptures demand our total yieldedness to him. Paul, you know, people make excuses, you know, when I might speak about Paul in a way similar to this, that I'm doing this morning. But they say, but that was the Apostle Paul.

I mean, he was an exceptional man. He had an exceptional calling. But there's something that so many of us just don't really get.

And that is that same factor or those same factors that so identify the Apostle Paul, so identify men and women who we think of as being outstanding. We've read their biographies or whatever it is. And we say, this was a wonderful man of God, a wonderful missionary, a great revivalist or whatever it may be.

But the fact is that those particular identifying features are to be as true in your life and in my life as they were in any one of these people that we may be thinking about. The real difference between the Apostle Paul and us would be this. For the Apostle Paul, he was not the product of modern evangelicalism.

He didn't pray a prayer like, I accept Christ as my personal saviour. He would never have done that. In fact, those words are never in the scripture anywhere.

He wouldn't have done that. The Apostle Paul, when he was Saul of Tarsus, he heard a voice from heaven saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Saul is now on his face on the ground. And he responds to that.

He knows without question he has been intercepted by some supernatural, some divine sort of being. And he says, who are you, Lord? And the word comes back to him, I am Jesus. It is hard for you to kick against the goads or the pricks.

I am Jesus. I've said before, the kind of imagery that comes to my mind is a vehicle. I joined the police because I like fast driving and I didn't like getting tickets, so I found another way around all that, where you could give them to other people.

But I think of a vehicle. At 100 miles an hour, this is Saul of Tarsus. He's moving at full throttle, when suddenly on the Damascus road, he runs right into solid concrete.

He's stopped in his tracks immediately. Who are you, Lord? He uses the same word again, but with a totally different meaning altogether. Having heard those words, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he now says, Lord, what would you have me to do? You know, to talk of the conversion of the Apostle Paul, or the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, perhaps more particularly, it is a huge, huge understatement.

Converted? Well, you can convert your garage and make it into a bedroom, perhaps, or something. What took place in the life of Saul of Tarsus was, as Oswald Chambers puts it, it was cataclysmic. It was completely life-transforming.

It was an instantaneous and absolute surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. A total miracle. It was supernatural.

He was transformed. And in that moment of time, in that moment, he yielded. He let go of his life.

He yielded total control of his life to Jesus. Amen. A lot more could be said about that, and I'm tempted.

But, you know, let's just return back to Philip's house for a few minutes. The group gathered, and were kind of with them, you know, in this. They'd watched the prophet Agabus come in.

They'd heard the pronouncement that he'd given. And, you know, they knew about the friends who'd been begging with him, and they joined in with it in verse 12, actually. When they all heard this, we besought him not to go to Jerusalem.

But they watched the response of this man. He was unmoved. He was unmoved by what he was hearing.

They watched, and they could not have done other than to have been challenged deeply by the response of this man who was utterly and totally resolute. There was no looking back. Nothing would be permitted to hinder him at all.

Glory be to God. What a tremendous example he is. Beloved, you know, it could be that the Holy Spirit, who is alive and with us today, and he's brooding over, you can say he's abiding within, but he's here brooding over our lives as we are seated here, wherever we are around the world, as we are talking with one another today.

It could be that the Holy Spirit himself is using what took place in Philip's house those long, long years ago for you and for me today. You know, this message of absolute surrender to God, it's an inconvenient truth. It's an inconvenient message.

It's an unwelcome message to our flesh. But you know, if the Spirit of God is handling our lives to this end, there will be, I believe, a deep sense, deep within the very epicentre of our being. We will know, perhaps, that we've pitched the tent of our lives in that field of compromise, just a stone's throw from Vanity Fair.

And, you know, it was an old saint from yesteryear who once said, if our hearts are willing for this, that is for this total surrender to God, if our hearts are willing for this, there is no limit to what God will do for us or to the blessing that he will bestow. Amen. You know, let me, you think I'm digressing all the way away from this.

I am not, allow me this digression. Many, many years ago, when I used to travel around more preaching, I remember staying with friends in the environs of Chicago and I remember seeing a newspaper and it was drawn to my attention, there's a photograph in this newspaper, the Chicago newspaper, and it was taken from the air and it was looking down onto a section of the Dan Ryan Expressway, which is usually an incredibly busy highway, frighteningly busy. I've driven it on motorcycle a number of times.

But this photograph was zeroed in on a section of the pavement there. Because in England, we don't, the pavement is where people walk, but in North America, the pavement's where vehicles travel. So it was in the main carriageway and written in red letters scrawled across the tarmac of the highway were these words, my dad died here.

That statement inevitably, inevitably brings a lot of emotion to our minds. But somehow it must have happened during the night that the son of someone who was killed at that very spot had managed to get out onto that highway, which was somewhat quieter at that time of night to scrawl these letters on the highway, because that spot meant so much, that spot was sacred to him. My dad died here.

I'm thinking Bob Jones and Margot will know who I'm talking about. But many years ago, a man of God that we all knew died in Exeter in England. And his body had just been removed from the bed where he had lain, and it was taken away.

And I heard a man of God, another man of God, that evening, say, I went into the room, and I looked down at the bed. And I said, bed, a man of God died on you this day. I've wondered to myself, if the Apostle Paul walked along the Damascus Road, and would remember that spot.

In my imagination, I can imagine him stopping and pausing. Because in that spot, that's where Saul of Tarsus died. Saul of Tarsus died here.

My dear friend, what about you? I don't know the circumstances in which you are right now, but it's quite likely that you're not in the middle of a busy highway. But your feet are on a carpet, very likely. But it could be that right there where you are, that could be your Damascus Road.

And I'm asking you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, you don't need to do it physically, unless you want to. But I'm asking you, as it were, to get down where you are right now, and stop running, and stop trying to live the Christian life, and stop longing for that which you do not experience, and just surrender your life to God. Amen.

You know, it was Francis Ridley Havergale, to quote another hymn, who wrote that great hymn, take my life and let it be wholly consecrated, Lord, to thee. Those of you who are familiar with the hymn, you will know that as the following verses unfold, she says, take my moments and my days. Then she says, take my hands, take my feet, take my voice, take my lips, take my money, take my intellect, take my will, take

my heart, take my love.

And then she says, take myself, and it will be ever only all for thee. I appeal to you, brethren, in the words of Scripture, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, that is the entirety of your entire being, everything that is your life. The flesh screams about it.

But God, if he's speaking in your heart, will lead you into the very best things that you could possibly experience as aspects of the surrendered life to God. Present your bodies entirely as a living sacrifice to God. I pray to God, and this is my prayer, that you will hear God speaking through this strange little journey that I've taken you on this morning, to bring you to a place where you realise the need to more fully and more completely surrender everything that is your person and your life to God.

If you're listening on the internet, consider leaving a comment. If you want, you can go to [mckenziefellowship.com](http://mckenziefellowship.com) and leave a message there. But rest assured that although we don't know who you are, we're praying that God will have his way with you.

God bless you all. Amen.

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